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SUBJECT: NAWA: ASSASSINATIONS CAST A PALL OVER RECENT GAINS

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Coordinator Scott Kilner  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1. (SBU)** Summary: The October 31 assassination of the chairman of the newly-formed Nawa District Community Council, and the November 10 assassinations of the deputy chairman and an additional council member, represent serious setbacks in one of Helmand Province's most important districts. Helmand Governor Mangal responded swiftly to the assassinations by launching an investigation, hosting a memorial, and expressing support for the Community Council at several shuras held in the district. The killings underscore the fragility of local governance in this former Taliban stronghold, notwithstanding the striking turnaround enabled by clearing operations in July and subsequent civil-military stabilization efforts by the District Support Team (DST) in partnership with local GIRoA actors. End Summary.

New Council Elected, Threatened

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**¶2. (U)** A District Community Council was established in Nawa in late October with the assistance of the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in order to implement the Afghan Social Outreach Program (ASOP) of the Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG). The Council is designed to serve as the voice of local residents on security matters, social and economic planning, dispute resolution and prioritization of development projects throughout the district. The 44-member Council was elected by secret ballot on October 14 from a list of 300 community leaders approved by the district and provincial governments. The Council subsequently received training about its roles and responsibilities, after which the members formed three committees to deal with Security, Justice, and Social Economic issues. On October 26, Mirwali Khan Barakzai from Aynak was elected chairman of the Council; Abdulla Popelzai from Hazar Asp Village in the Bagrabat area of Nawa District was elected deputy chairman.

**¶3. (S)** Immediately after ASOP initially organized trips for PRT and GIRoA officials ahead of the Council's formation, the DST received reports about "night letters" (written Taliban threats) received by some members because of their participation on the Council. On October 30, the day after the ASOP workshop ended, Chairman Mirwali Khan was abducted near Aynak village by the Taliban while returning from a trip to the Provincial capital Lashkar Gah; his body was found the following day, October 31. That same day, deputy chairman Abdulla, having received a telephone warning from Rahmat Jan, AKA Mullah Niamatullah - who calls himself the Nawa Taliban Shadow District Governor - immediately fled with his family to Lashkar Gah. The Secretary and two other Council members, who also received threats, moved into District Governor (DG) Manaf's compound (adjacent to PB Jaker) for safety. State DST officer met that day with several Council members who expressed concerns for their safety.

## Governor Responds, but More Threats

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**¶4.** (SBU) Provincial Governor Mangal responded quickly to the events, immediately dispatching a senior aide to Nawa district center to address Council members and to express condolences to the family of Mirwali Khan. In a further demonstration of concern, Mangal sent a high profile delegation composed of senior officials from the Afghan National Police (ANP), National Directorate of Security (NDS), and the Prosecutor's Office to Nawa to initiate an investigation. The delegation returned to Lashkar Gah after a day, but indicated they had suspects.

**¶5.** (SBU) The following day, only seven members attended the Community Council's regularly-scheduled weekly meeting, and their discussion during the meeting focused solely on security concerns. One member reported that the Taliban had poured gasoline on his vehicle and burnt it to the ground. Others indicated that they had been threatened as well and were taking precautions. Several requested weapons. The chairman and deputy chairman of the Security Sub-committee were also reported to have received threats. On November 7, 22 Council members - half of the total - traveled to Lashkar Gah to pay their respects at a memorial for Mirwali Khan hosted by Governor Mangal. When asked by the DST, several Council members who did not make the trip claimed that they had been too busy to attend; one member candidly admitted that he did not want to be seen on television.

### Two More Assassinations

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**¶6.** (SBU) On November 10, DST officers learned that two other Council members, deputy chairman Abdullah and Mawlawi Mohammad Anwar, had been assassinated in the southern portion of Nawa District. Both men had attended the shura with the District Governor, DST officer, and Marines earlier in the day. During his initial inquiry, DG Manaf traveled to their places of residence to pay his respects and attempted to determine what had happened. While there, local villagers told him that he, the District Governor, had killed them because he asked them to be on the Council.

**¶7.** (SBU) On November 12, Deputy Provincial Governor Sattar, along with representatives from NDS and the provincial prosecutor's office, traveled to Nawa and held a shura for Council members and others; 17 Council members turned up for the shura, most said they continue to receive threats. One member said that he was "ready to die for my country and my people," and declared that the Community Council would continue to meet. Sattar told the assembled group that 5 NDS investigators would be sent to Nawa to pursue the killers, and that a prosecutor would remain as well. (Note: The NDS personnel arrived the same day.) In response to Council members' concerns, Sattar said that members under threat could stay at the Governor's compound overnight for the next 20-30 days, and that ANP would secure the compound. Sattar stated his confidence that the investigation would result in the arrest of those who had killed their colleagues. Several Council members asked to be provided with weapons and security. Sattar acceded to their requests.

**¶8. (S)** Comment: We are still assessing the consequences of these killings in Nawa, who orchestrated them, and why. In the complex stew of Helmandi politics and allegiances, the difference between an insurgent intimidation campaign and the myriad disputes among local power brokers is difficult to discern. Many elders (and some members of Governor Mangal's staff) have posited that members of the old District Development Authority, whose role as community representative was usurped by the Community Council's creation, were behind the attacks.

19. (S) Comment continued: In any event, the situation in Nawa remains fragile and complex. The limited attendance at Council meetings after the killings and at the November 12 shura indicates clearly that Council members are intimidated.

While the killings cast a pall over recent gains in Nawa, the positive progress on security, freedom of movement, and willingness of local elders to work with GIRoA are undeniable steps forward. That elders with prior Taliban ties are engaging with GIRoA and entering into local governance leadership positions is very positive; that insurgents (or others) have successfully injected consequence into natural reintegration efforts is cause for concern. The commitment shown by the Governor, District Governor and those Council members willing to face the threats in order to continue the Community Council demonstrates a readiness to do the hard business of governing on the part of these courageous individuals. DST Nawa and U.S. Marines will continue to vigorously support these efforts.

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